

Environmental Assessment

Tower Rock State Park

October 28, 2004

MONTANA FISH WILDLIFE & PARKS

MEPA/NEPA/23-1-110 MCA CHECKLIST

Following is the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks checklist for Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Environmental Assessments (EA's). It can also be used for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Assessment documents for Federal Aid in Wildlife (P-R) and Sport Fish (W-B) Restoration projects.

NOTE: Another five pages of checklist and letters developed for 23-1-110 MCA by the Parks Division are not attached to this document. The Parks Division and each Regional Parks Manager has the 23-1-110 MCA information.

MEPA/NEPA/23-1-110 MCA CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of Proposed State Action

This project would formally designate a new State Park unit to be called Tower Rock State Historic Site. Site improvements would include the construction of a graveled parking area and an interpretive exhibit.

2. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action

FWP has authority to provide development and access for public recreation. 23-2-101 MCA.

3. Name of Project

Tower Rock State Historic Site Development

4. Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency)

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls MT 59405

5. If Applicable: Estimated Construction/Commencement Date

As soon as possible

6. Estimated Completion Date

No later than June 1, 2005

7. Current Status of Project Design (% complete)

50%

8. Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range and township)

Cascade County, Montana, Sec 33, T17N, R2W,

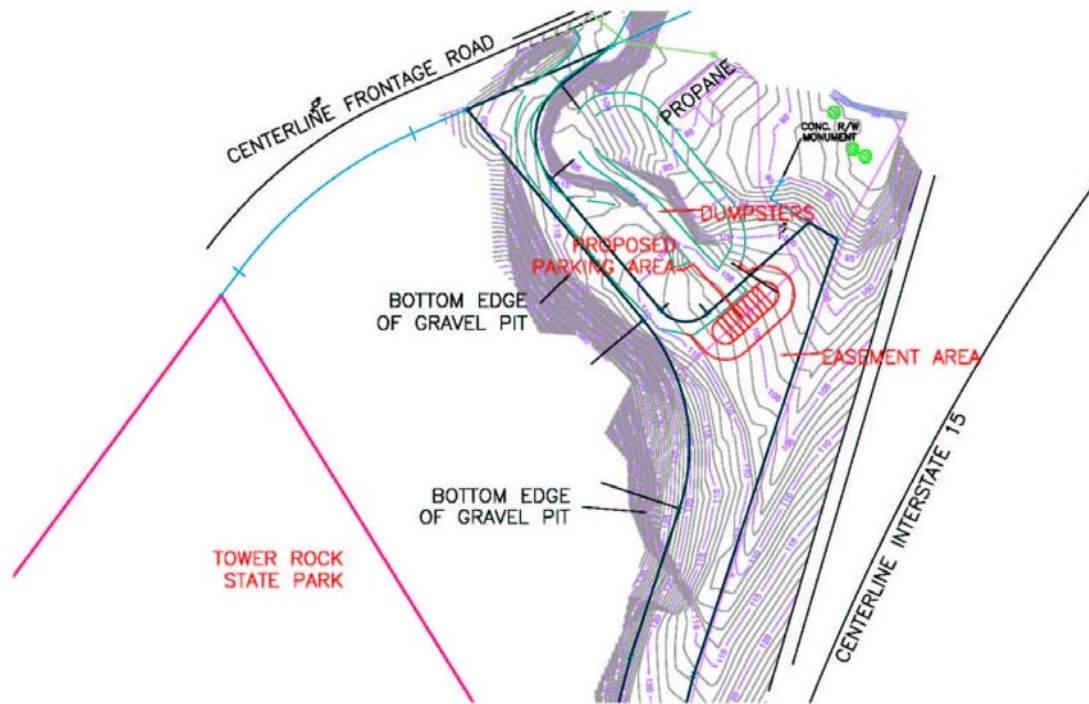
9. Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

Land Type	Acres	Land Type	Acres
a) Developed		d) Floodplain	0
• residential	0	(e) Productive	
• industrial	0	• Irrigated cropland	0
b) Open Space/Recreation	0	• Dry cropland	0
c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	0	• Forestry	0
		• Rangeland	.28
		• other	0

10. Map: attach an original 8 1/2" x 11" or larger section of the most recent USGS 7.5' series topographic map showing the location and boundaries of the area that would be affected by the proposed action. A different map scale may be substituted if more appropriate or if required by agency rule. If available, a site plan should also be attached.



10. Site Plan:



11. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

(a) Permits:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>	<u>Date Filed/#</u>
N/A		

(b) Designations:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Designation</u>	<u>Date Filed/</u>
U.S. Dept. of Interior	National Register of Historic Places	March 18, 2002

(c) Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks	\$6,200
Reaching the Rockies Chapter Lewis & Clark Heritage Foundation	\$5,000 donation (for Interpretive Exhibits)

(d) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
Montana Dept. of Transportation	Issued 3.291 acre easement (#R0084386) to MT FWP for ingress, egress, and public access to the site

12. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

This project would formally designate and improve the Tower Rock State Historic Site, a Lewis and Clark Trail landmark located in the Missouri River valley 32 miles south of Great Falls. These actions would enhance public access, understanding, and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources at the site and its significance as an important Lewis and Clark Trail landmark.

The following site improvements are proposed:

- 1) The site would be officially designated and signed appropriately as a State Historic Site administered by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.
- 2) The public would be advised of access points to the site by posting standard highway signs on the Interstate 15 right of way, informing northbound and southbound motorists of the site via the Hardy Creek Exit.
- 3) The public would be advised of the turn in to the site by posting appropriate signs on the Old Highway # 91 right-of-way (River Recreation Road)
- 4) A parking area, approximately 12,400 square feet in size, would be constructed to accommodate five automobiles and three Recreational Vehicles on the south end of the site adjacent to the existing graveled dumpster area.
- 5) A two or three panel interpretive exhibit would be installed adjacent to the parking area, informing the public of the significance of the site.
- 6) A primitive trail (non-ADA), approximately 300 feet long, would be designated across the grasslands from the parking area to a vantage point at the base of Tower Rock.
- 7) The existing barbwire fence adjacent to the site would be relocated following construction of the parking area.

13. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (Region Four – Great Falls)

- Mike Aderhold – Regional Supervisor
- Roger Semler – Regional Parks Manager
- Ray Swartz – Regional Maintenance Supervisor
- Travis Horton – Fisheries Biologist
- Corey Loecker – Wildlife Biologist

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (Parks Division – Helena)

- Tom Reilly – Assistant Administrator
- Ken Soderberg – Resource Program Manager

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (Design & Construction Bureau - Helena)

- Paul Valle – Design and Construction Bureau Chief
- Bardell Mangum – Landscape Architect

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil that would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		X	a.
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

a. A grassland pasture will be disturbed to construct a 12,400 square foot parking area. This will result in a permanent loss of vegetative cover. These impacts will be offset by the benefits to public use and enjoyment of the site.

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 (c))			X			a.
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a)		X				
f. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

a. During parking area construction there will be minor impacts to the air quality of the site resulting from dust, exhaust from construction vehicles and equipment. These impacts will be temporary and minimal. If significant dust is generated from the project, water trucks will be utilized to wet periodically wet down the project area. Exhaust from idling vehicles will be kept to a minimum. No other mitigation is deemed necessary.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. *Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				a.
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)		X				
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)		X				
n. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X		X	a.
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		X				
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

a. There will be a loss of approximately 12,400 square feet of grasslands/pasture. These impacts will be offset by the benefits to public use and enjoyment of the site. The remaining grasslands surrounding Tower Rock will be managed in a manner that maintains and restores native grasslands and vegetation. Construction of the parking area may cause site disturbance that would elevate the risk of noxious weed infestation. Fish, Wildlife and Parks will continue their long-standing commitment to eliminate noxious weeds at this site.

5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of non-game species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f)		X				
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)		X				
j. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X			a
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

a. Increased noise levels will result during the site development and construction phase and during the duration of the Corps II event due to visitor use increases in the area. These noise levels will be minor, short term, and will not require mitigation.

2. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

3. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?			X			a.
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

a. Tower Rock is prime rattlesnake and tick habitat and public use of the site may result in increased exposure to these risks. Visitor's attempting to scramble to the top of Tower Rock may be exposed to rock-fall hazard. Appropriate signage and safety messages will be posted to mitigate these risks. Vehicle ingress and egress into the site off of Old Highway #91 may create some increased traffic hazard. Appropriate signage will be installed to warn motorists of this turn off.

4. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?			X			a.
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

a. Traffic is anticipated to increase slightly in this area due to increased interest and awareness of this site. Since recreational use along the River Recreation Road is already relatively high the increase will not result in any additional social impacts. Appropriate signage will be installed along Old State Highway #91 to warn approaching motorists of the ingress and egress occurring at the site.

5. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:			X			a.
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased used of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources						b.
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						c.
g. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- a. This site will be managed as a pack it in – pack it out site, meaning there will be no garbage cans or refuse removal provided. However, there is a county dumpster site located on Montana Department of Transportation land immediately adjacent to the site. Future use of this site may dictate the eventual need for a vault toilet at this site.
- b. Capital Funding is provided by Montana State Parks.
- c. On-going operations and maintenance funding is provided FWP Region Four Parks Division. There is currently a sufficient budget in the overall operations and maintenance budget to provide for these modest maintenance needs.

6. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)		X				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c)		X				
e. Other: (Site regulations)			X			a.

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

a. Proposed recreational use regulations for this site include:

- Pack It In – Pack It Out
- Pets On Leash
- Day Use Only – No Overnight Camping
- No Campfires
- No Shooting

7. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a)		X				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

B. SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

1. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT				Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)			X			a.
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the		X				

nature of the impacts that would be created?						
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)		X				
g. ***For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

- a. The overall impacts associated with this proposed action are low. Any changes to the site will be beneficial to visitor use and enjoyment of the site.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW, CONTINUED

2. Alternatives

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

No Action Alternative:

The site would not be developed and basic visitor facilities and interpretive exhibits would not be provided for. The site would remain on the National Register of Historic Places, however public awareness and enjoyment of the site would be limited.

Project as proposed:

The Tower Rock State Historic Site would be formally designated and administered by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. All site improvements would be located on land owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks on the east side of Tower Rock and west of the Interstate #15 right of way. A small parking lot (approximately 12,400 square feet), designed to accommodate approximately eight vehicles (including buses and recreational vehicles) would be developed and surfaced with either $\frac{3}{4}$ inch minus gravel or re-constituted asphalt millings. A two or three panel interpretive exhibit would be installed adjacent to the parking area to orient and educate the public about the historic significance of the site. Standard directional signing to the site would be installed on the approaches along Old State Highway #91 and the Interstate #15 rights-of-way. A short trail (approximately 300 feet long) would be designated by mowing a swath across the grasslands from the parking area to a vantage point at the base of the landmark.

Alternative # 1:

The same improvements as listed in the "project as proposed" would be made on FWP lands located on the west side of Tower Rock. While this would also be a suitable location, it lacks the benefits of an existing access road and development of the site would disturb more land and cost more, making it less desirable at this time.

Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None identified

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The developments and improvements at the Tower Rock State Historic Site are consistent with short-term park plans. Developing the site now will allow the public to visit, learn from and enjoy this important Lewis and Clark landmark in time for the 2005 Lewis and Clark signature event next summer and into the future.

PART IV. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required (YES/NO)? If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

With no anticipated public opposition or significant impacts to the environment an EA is the appropriate level of analysis.

- 2. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?**

Enhancement and development of the Tower Rock site has received widespread public support. On November 26 2003, the Upper Missouri Lewis and Clark Bi-centennial Commission and the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Commission of Lewis and Clark County supported the Reaching the Rockies Chapter of the Lewis and Clark Heritage Foundation in their efforts to protect and enhance the Tower Rock site.

On February 12, 2004, the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission approved the transfer of the 136.82-acre Tower Rock site from the Montana Department of Transportation to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and on February 17, 2004, the State Land Board approved this transfer of land. These actions were in response to public desires.

3. Duration of comment period, if any.

This EA will have a 30-day comment period starting October 27, 2004 and continuing through November 27, 2004. All comments must be postmarked or received before 5:00 pm November 27, 2004.

Comments may be directed to:

**Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Tower Rock EA
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls MT 59405**

Or may be emailed to: rsemler@state.mt.us

4. Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

Roger Semler
Regional Parks Manager
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls MT 59405
(406) 454-5859